13 April 2009

The Algerian War

St. Michel Bridge over the Seine River
Paris, France
Introduction

Decolonization changed Europe, as much as it did the former colonies; in no case was this more true than with French Algeria.

- Introduction
- French Algeria, 1830-1945
- “Events” in Algeria
- Terror and torture
- 1958 crisis and founding of Fifth Republic

Delacroix, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834)

Algerian War: Lecture Structure

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French Empire in 1945 (*la plus grande France* = “greater France”)

- French West Africa (Mali, Niger, Senegal, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Benin)
- Algeria (approx)
- French Equatorial Africa
  - today: Gabon, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic

Algerian War: Introduction (war and transformation of Empires)
Spectacle and Myth of Empire in the French Fourth Republic

“I am at the barber’s, and a copy of *Paris Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a uniform is saluting… I see very well what it signifies: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, serve faithfully under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro…”


Little Diouf has come from Ouagadougou [Burkina Faso] with his friends, children of the troops from French West Africa, to open the fantastic spectacle that the French Army will perform at the Sports Palace this week.
Challenges to French Legitimacy in “Indochina,” 1940-1954

Vichy government ruled with support of Japan

1945 brief period of direct Japanese rule

September 2, 1945—Ho Chi Minh and his supporters (Viet Minh) declare independence on basis that “all men are created equal” and “have inalienable right” to “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness”;

1948—France creates “autonomous” Vietnamese State with capital in Saigon (southern Vietnam)

March-May 1954 Dien Bien Phu (10% of French troops in Vietnam killed); French offensive and surrender

soldier of the French Foreign Legion in military cemetery in Hanoi after ceasefire declared (July 1954); on the tombstone “here lies Vancembrock, dead on the field of honor, 22 April 1954”

photo from French Min. of Defense, ECPAD
1830-1850s French military conquest of “Algeria”
1848 Algeria divided into three “departments”
1870 Algerian Jews granted full citizenship
1871 “regime of exception”
Algeria and Orientalism: Cultural Representations and Economic Realities

1946-1954
24.4% of French imports were from the colonies
37.6% of French exports were to the colonies
Population of Algeria, 1954
9,000,000 “French Moslems”
1,100,000 “colons” (European descent —French, Italian, Maltese)
50,000 Jewish
Sétif Massacre

May 8, 1945  Parade to celebrate German surrender leads
to clashes between paraders with banner
“down with fascism and colonialism” and local police
May 9-10    attacks on local “European” residents
May 11-20   police reprisals (official death toll: 1,020;
other estimates as high as 40,000)
It is about time that the Resistance fighters had their own organ of expression… To be sure, the truth is appearing, even alongside the official French lies… Still, spreading the truth about the War of Independence prolongs our military successes and will consolidate unity. … our goal is to liberate ourselves of colonialist restraints in order to create democracy and equality for all Algerians, regardless of race or religion. …

Editorial to the first issue of *El Moudjahid* (1956).

FLN – “National Liberation Front”

founded by Ben Bella in 1954 (in Cairo)
Costs of the “Events in Algeria”

French troops “maintaining order and establishing security” in Algeria
early 1955 83,000
1956 450,000

(18% of national budget)

Casualties of “the events in Algeria” 1954-1962
Algerian nationalists 150,000 or more
French military dead 18,000
wounded 65,000
harkis [Algerians 30,000 deaths fighting with French army]
Algeria and the Intellectuals

The French are attached to the land of Algeria by roots that are too old and too hardy for anyone to think they can be pulled up. But this does not give them the right, in my mind, to cut off the roots of Arab culture and life. ... The only future that is acceptable is one in which France... will render justice without discrimination (in all directions) for all the communities of Algeria... Today, as before, my only ambition is to contribute to the definition of this future. If in Algeria, the French and Arab people unify their differences, the future will have a sense for the French, the Arabs, and the entire world.

--Albert Camus, Algerian Chronicles

Come, Comrades, it would be as well to change our ways... We must leave our dreams behind... Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of all their own streets, in all the corners of the globe...Come then, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe. ...

--Franz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth (1961).

Fanon (1925-1961): born in Martinique, served in French army during World War Two. Trained in Lyon as a psychiatrist, went to work in Algerian hospital in 1954.

Algerian War: “events” in Algeria and the meaning of “France”
Torture in Algeria

My glasses had long since fallen off. My near-sightedness reinforced still more strongly the impression of unreality, of nightmare…

Suddenly, one of them pulled me up. He was beside himself, this was going on too long. “Listen, you scum! You’re finished! You’re going to talk! Everybody talks here!” We fought the war in Indochina, that was enough to know your type. But you know what? this is the Gestapo here! You’ve heard of the Gestapo?”… your whore of a Republic, we’ll blow it up, too! You’re going to talk, I tell you!” On the table was a piece of board. He picked it up and used it to beat me.

Henri Alleg, *The Question* (published in France in 1958 by editions de Minuit [Midnight Editions]).
From Fourth Republic to Fifth Republic in France

May 13, 1958—formation of “Committee of Public Safety” in Algiers in support of “French Algeria”; takes over government buildings in Algeria and Corsica; elects General Massu as “President”

May 19, 1958—De Gaulle says he is willing to enter government, but not under current constitution

June 1, 1958—French National Assembly elects De Gaulle head of government, give him special powers for six months until new constitution can be written

The disarray of the state has inevitably alienated France’s people and brought trouble for her army. For twelve years, the regime of party politics has shown itself too weak to deal with the difficulties it faces, and has led to national dislocation and the loss of independence. In the past, the country in its wisdom trusted me to lead it to salvation [salut ].

Today, in the face of grave new challenges, I want the country to know that I am again ready to assume the powers of the Republic.

The end of French Algeria?

June 4, 1958  De Gaulle tells French Algerians, “je vous ai compris” (I have understood you)

Jan. 24-Feb. 2, 1960 “Week of the barricades” in Algeria in favor of “French Algeria”

Jan. 8., 1961 Referendum in France; 75% in support of Algerian “self determination”

April 22, 1961 putsch of the Generals in Algiers; its repression by De Gaulle leads to founding of OAS (Secret Army Organization), which targets supporters of Algerian independence

Oct. 17, 1961 after Paris police imposes curfew on “French Moslems from Algeria” peaceful protest brutally repressed by police—hundreds or more killed

March 18,1962 Evian Accords grant Algerian independence; European residents given three years in which to decide whether to take Algerian nationality or remain as “foreign nationals”

May-Dec. 1962 “Exodus” of over 700,000 pieds noirs from Algeria